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UNCLAS COLOMBO 000456

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SME LOR SUBMISSION FOR 30 MM BUSHMASTER CANNONS

REF: GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA LETTER OF REQUEST DATE 14

MARCH 2003

SUBJECT SME LOR SUBMISSION FOR 30MM BUSHMASTER CANNONS

1. THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA HAS SUBMITTED REFERENCE (FORWARDED UNDER SEPARATE COVER) REQUEST FOR A SYSTEM SALE LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE FOR TEN 30MM AUTOMATIC "BUSHMASTER" CANNONS WITH ASSOCIATED MOUNTING, FIRE CONTROL, TRAINING, SPARES AND AMMUNITION.

2. AMEMBASSY COLOMBO STRONGLY SUPPORTS THIS SALE AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 70003 OF THE SAMM, THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS SUBMITTED:

A. SRI LANKA REQUIRES THE BUSHMASTER CANNONS TO UPGRADE ITS NAVY FAST ATTACK AND COASTAL PATROL CRAFT. SRI LANKA NAVY SHIPS OPERATING IN COASTAL WATERS ARE CURRENTLY OUTGUNNED BY THE LTTE. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A SINGLE ANCIENT 40MM CANNON ON THE NAVY'S INDIAN-MADE OFFSHORE PATROL VESSEL, DECK GUNS ARE ALL 20-23MM. A US-DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ASSESSMENT OF THE SRI LANKAN MILITARY IN SEPTEMBER 2002 REPORTED THE WEAKNESS OF MARITIME SURVEILLANCE AND INTERDICTION CAPABILITY TO BE THE CENTER OF GRAVITY IN THE WAR AGAINST THE LTTE. A LARGER CALIBER DECK GUN FOR THE NAVY WAS THE ONLY LETHAL SYSTEM MENTIONED IN NEARLY FIVE HUNDRED PAGES OF THE DOD ASSESSMENTS. BUSHMASTER CANNONS WOULD GIVE THE NAVY A GREATER CAPABILITY TO FIGHT THE FASTER, MORE HEAVILY GUNNED LTTE BOATS, AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INCENTIVE TO THE LTTE TO MOVE TOWARDS PEACE AND AWAY FROM CONFLICT.

B. SIMILAR THOUGH SMALLER CALIBER WEAPONS ARE ALREADY IN THE NAVY'S INVENTORY, SO THERE SHOULD BE NO ALTERATION TO FORCE STRUCTURE. THE INCREASE IN RANGE, LETHALITY AND ACCURACY HOWEVER, SHOULD GREATLY ENHANCE SRI LANKA'S CAPABILITY TO DEFEND ITS COASTAL WATERS AGAINST THE LTTE SEA TIGERS.

C. IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT SRI LANKA'S NEIGHBORS WILL HAVE NO SIGNIFICANT OR NEGATIVE REACTION TO THIS SALE. INDIA HAS ASSISTED SRI LANKA AGAINST THE LTTE IN A NUMBER OF WAYS, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH HAS BEEN MARITIME INTERDICTION. THE INTRODUCTION OF A NAVAL WEAPON SYSTEM THAT MIGHT REDUCE INDIA'S ASSISTANCE REQUIREMENTS WOULD LIKELY BE VIEWED POSITIVELY IN NEW DELHI.

D. WITH PROPER TRAINING, SAILORS IN THE SRI LANKA NAVY SHOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE OPERATING AND MAINTAINING THE BUSHMASTERS, AT LEAST UP TO AND INCLUDING INTERMEDIATE LEVEL. TRAINING AND SPARES ARE EXPECTED IN THE INITIAL PURCHASE, SO THE NAVY WILL LIKELY TRAIN DEDICATED PERSONNEL TO FOCUS ON BUSHMASTER SYSTEMS MAINTENANCE.

E. THIS SALE SHOULD BE FINANCED WITH COUNTRY FUNDS. THIS PROCUREMENT WAS NOT INCLUDED IN THE ANNUAL DEFENSE PROCUREMENT BUDGET FOR 2003, BUT SENIOR OFFICIALS HAVE VERIFIED THAT FUNDING WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE. SINCE THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE HAVE DESIGNATED THIS PROCUREMENT A PRIORITY, SUFFICIENT FUNDS SHOULD BE EARMARKED FOR THE PURCHASE WITHIN THE REQUIRED TIME. THE OVERALL ECONOMIC IMPACT TO THE SRI LANKAN ECONOMY IS INSIGNIFICANT.

F. ALTHOUGH HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS CONTINUE TO BE A PRIORITY WITH AMEMBASSY COLOMBO, THE GENERAL LEVEL OF HUMAN RIGHTS GUARANTEES IS GOOD AND IMPROVING CONTINUOUSLY IN SRI LANKA. THIS CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT AFFECT THE PROPOSED SALE.

G. AMEMBASSY COLOMBO STRONGLY RECOMMENDS THE APPROVAL OF THIS PROPOSED SALE.

3. POC FOR THIS ACTION IS LTC RICHARD S. GIRVEN, ARMY AND DEFENSE ATTACHE, USDAO COLOMBO.

WILLS